

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07  
LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 AGR-01 ACDA-07 DODE-00  
PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15  
USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /106 W  
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FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3460  
INFO AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN  
AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARAMARIBO 0588

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, NS  
SUBJECT: COMMUNIST AGITATION AT SUGAR PLANTATION

SUMMARY: COMMUNIST EFFORTS TO TAKE OVER THE UNION LEADERSHIP AT SURINAM'S ONLY OPERATING SUGAR PLANTATION HAVE RECEIVED A REBUFF FROM SURINAM'S COURT SYSTEM, WHICH REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE A NEW UNION COMMITTEE SELECTED AT A RUMP MEETING THREE WEEKS AGO. HOWEVER, LABOR ACTIVIST AND COMMUNIST LEADER HUMPHREY KEERVELD IS NOT LIKELY TO LEAVE THE FIELD TO HIS COMPETITION, WHICH IS COMPRISED CHIEFLY OF MEMBERS OF MINISTER OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BRUMA'S PARTY, THE PNR. CONTINUED AGITATION AT THE PLANTATION WILL CREATE ONE MORE OBSTACLE TO GOS EFFORTS TO REVITALIZE ITS SEVERELY AILING SUGAR INDUSTRY, WHICH LAST YEAR WAS UNABLE TO MEET EVEN DOMESTIC REQUIREMENTS.

1. AS PART OF HIS CONTINUING EFFORTS TO GAIN INFLUENCE IN SURINAM'S LABOR MOVEMENT, COMMUNIST LEADER HUMPHREY KEERVELD (HEAD OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF SURINAM AND THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S FRONT) RECENTLY ATTEMPTED TO TAKE  
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OVER THE UNION LEADERSHIP AT SURINAM'S ONLY OPERATING SUGAR PLANTATION, MARIENBURG. AFTER THE INCUMBENT UNION CHAIRMAN, FRED DERBY (PNR MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND CHAIRMAN OF THE C-47 LABOR FEDERATION), REFUSED A REQUEST FROM 86 OF KEERVELD'S SUPPORTERS FOR A SPECIAL UNION MEETING, KEERVELD CALLED A RUMP MEETING JUNE 3 AT WHICH HE WAS APPROVED. DERBY DID NOT ACCEPT THE ACTION AND

MARIENBURG MANAGEMENT, WHICH IS RESPONSIBLE TO THE GOS AS OWNER OF THE PLANTATION, REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE THE NEW COMMITTEE. KEERVELD THEN TURNED TO THE COURTS WHICH, AFTER ATTEMPTS AT COMPROMISE HAD FAILED, RULED ON JUNE 27 THAT MEETING WHICH HAD ELECTED HIM WAS NOT LEGAL AND ASSESSED COSTS FOR THE LEGAL PROCESS AGAINST HIM.

2. DURING THREE-WEEK INTERREGNUM WHEN TWO UNION COMMITTEES CLAIMED THEY REPRESENTED THE MARIENBURG WORKERS, PLANTATION EXPERIENCED STRIKES AND SLOW DOWN ACTIONS WHICH RESULTED IN STRENGTHENING OF POLICE FORCES TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND PERMIT CONTINUED OPERATION OF THE PLANTATION AT A REDUCED LEVEL OF ACTIVITY. GOVERNMENT DOCTOR ATTACHED TO PLANTATION, WHO LED COMMUNIST ACTION ALONG WITH KEERVELD, WAS TRANSFERRED, A NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES WHO SUPPORTED KEERVELD WERE DISMISSED, AND AT LEAST ONE PERSON WAS SHOT BY THE POLICE, ALLEGEDLY IN SELF-DEFENSE. AT TIMES THERE WERE FEARS THAT SITUATION COULD HAVE GOTTEN OUT OF HAND AS RIVAL GROUPS CONFRONTED EACH OTHER, BUT LEVEL OF ACTUAL VIOLENCE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN VERY LOW.

3. COMMENT: FUTURE OF KEERVELD'S ATTEMPT TO TAKE OVER THIS IMPORTANT UNION REPRESENTING ABOUT 1400 WORKERS IS UNCLEAR. HAVING LOST LEGAL BATTLE AGAINST DERBY, HE WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO AGITATE AMONG THE WORKERS WATCHING FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHALLENGE DERBY AGAIN. CONFIDENTIAL

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THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT MUCH OF KEERVELD'S SUPPORT COMES FROM GUYANESE LABORERS WHO ARE WORKING AS CANE CUTTERS AT MARIENBURG, A JOB WHICH VERY FEW SURINAMERS WANT ANY PART OF, AND THERE WERE APPARENTLY A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF BUSH NEGROES WHO WERE ALSO WILLING TO GIVE KEERVELD'S TACTICS A CHANCE.

4. KEERVELD'S LOSS IN SURINAM'S COURTS CLOSES AT LEAST THE FIRST PHASE IN HIS EFFORTS TO WIN THE MARIENBURG UNION. THIS IS THE THIRD ATTEMPT BY KEERVELD WITHIN THE PAST YEAR TO TAKE OVER A MAJOR UNION; HE PREVIOUSLY LOST AT THE MINING UNIONS AT BILLITON (WHERE HE CONTESTED AN ELECTION FOR THE CHAIRMANSHIP IN NOVEMBER 1976) AND AT PARANAM (WHERE HIS CANDIDATE TO HEAD THE UNION REPRESENTING WORKERS AT SURALCO'S OPERATIONS THERE LOST) LAST MAY. HIS SUPPORTERS WERE ALSO RECENTLY FORCED OUT OF THE UNION REPRESENTING BANANA WORKERS IN NICKERIE DISTRICT. DESPITE THIS ROSTER OF DEFEATS, WE WOULD EXPECT HIM TO CONTINUE HIS ACTIVITIES AT MARIENBURG AND ELSEWHERE, HOPING TO CAPITALIZE ON ANY OPENING WHICH HIS REVALS GIVE HIM.

5. UNREST AT MARIENBURG HAS AFFECTED PLANTATION'S PRODUCTION, WHICH GOS HAD HOPED WOULD RECOVER TO A LEVEL SUFFICIENT TO MEET DOMESTIC SUGAR REQUIREMENTS OF ABOUT 11,000 TONS ANNUALLY AS WELL AS SURINAM'S EXPORT QUOTA TO THE EEC OF 4,000 TONS, WHICH WAS RECENTLY REGAINED AFTER BEING LOST FOR NON-DELIVERY IN 1976. SUGAR INDUSTRY'S GREATEST PROBLEM IS A SHORTAGE OF FIELD LABOR, WHICH GOS HAS SOUGHT TO CORRECT BY IMPORTING GUYANESE AND NOW HAITIANS. KEERVELD'S SUCCESS WITH THE GUYANESE SHOULD SERVE AS A WARNING TO THE GOS THAT IDEOLOGY MAY ALSO BE IMPORTED ALONG WITH THE FOREIGN WORKDER, BUT WHETHER GOS WILL REASSESS ITS POLICY OF IMPORTING LABOR TO FILL GAPS IN THE WORKING FORCE, PARTICULARLY IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, REMAINS TO BE SEEN.  
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6. THE LABOR SCENE HAS WITNESSED A NUMBER OF DIFFICULTIES SO FAR IN 1977. NEGOTIATIONS AND DISPUTES PRODUCED WORK STOPPAGES AND SLOW DOWNS AT SURINAM AIRWAYS, BILLITON, EMKAY (THE CONSORTIUM BUILDING A RAILROAD IN WEST SURINAM), S.A.I.L. (A CASTLE AND COOKE SHRIMP PROCESSING FACILITY), AND AMONG WORKERS REPRESENTING GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS, HARBOR WORKERS, AND THE SHIPPING COMPANY WHICH THE GOS IS ABOUT TO TAKE OVER FROM ROYAL DUTCH STEAMSHIP LINES (KNSM). WHILE MOST OF THESE DISPUTES HAVE BEEN CONTAINED, LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS HAVE FALLEN TO A LOW EBB, AND ANY PROSPECTIVE INVESTOR IS SURE TO WEIGH THE LABOR SITUATION HEAVILY IN HIS DECISION MAKING. AT THE SAME TIME, THE GOS, WHICH IS DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN A NUMBER OF ECONOMIC ENTERPRISES, IS FREQUENTLY CAUGHT BETWEEN ITS EFFORTS TO HOLD DOWN COSTS AND A POLITICAL NEED TO RETAIN LABOR SUPPORT.

7. FOR THE MOMENT, DERBY'S, BRUMA'S, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S HANDS HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED, BUT WHO WOULD WIN AN OPEN ELECTION FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF MARIENBURG'S UNION IS DEBATABLE. THERE IS OBVIOUSLY DISCONTENT THERE WITH THE DERBY REGIME, BUT ESTIMATES OF THE EXTENT OF ANTI-DERBY SENTIMENT AND HOW MANY OF KEERVELD'S SUPPORTERS ARE ACTUALLY UNION MEMBERS DEPEND ON WHO IS OFFERING THE FIGURES. PART OF DERBY'S DILEMMA STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT THE PNR'S INTERESTS IN MARIENBURG ARE DIVIDED, WITH BRUMA AS PNR HEAD REPRESENTING MANAGEMENT CONCERNS AND DERBY DEFENDING UNION INTERESTS AT THE SAME ENTERPRISE. COOPERATION BETWEEN DERBY AND MANAGEMENT TO PREVENT KEERVELD, WHO WOULD NATURALLY DELIGHT IN ANY EMBARRASSMENT TO THE PNR, FROM TAKING POWER COULD BECOME A SEVERE HANDICAP FOR DERBY. IN A COUNTRY WHERE LABOR AND POLITICS ARE DEEPLY INTERTWINED,  
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WHAT WE CAN ANTICIPATE IS CONTINUED CLOSE ATTENTION ON  
THE PART OF BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS OPPONENTS TO  
DEVELOPMENTS ON THE LABOR FRONT WHICH COULD AFFECT NATIONAL  
ELECTIONS LATER THIS YEAR.

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